

THE Baptist Record

JOURNAL OF THE MISSISSIPPI BAPTIST CONVENTION SINCE 1877

Vol. 136
No. 50

MBCB EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE



NEW OFFICERS — Matt Buckles (center), pastor of First Church, Vicksburg, has been selected by members of the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board to serve as president of the board for the coming year. Serving with Buckles will be Mark Vincent (right), pastor of Clarke Venable Church, Decatur, as first vice-president, and Rex Yancey, pastor of First Church, Ripley, as secretary. (Photo by William H. Perkins Jr.)

MBCB taps officers, executive committee

By William H. Perkins Jr.
Editor

Mississippi Baptist Convention Board (MBCB) members have selected Matt Buckles, pastor of First Church, Vicksburg, to serve as president for the coming year. Board members also selected Mark Vincent, pastor of Clarke Venable Church, Decatur, to serve as board vice-president, and Rex Yancey, pastor of First Church, Ripley, to serve as board secretary.

Messengers from local Baptist churches attending the annual meeting of the Mississippi Bap-

tist Convention approve board members nominated by local Baptist associations and also at-large nominations. The convention board is responsible for managing the convention's ministries and business affairs when the convention is not in session.

The convention board in turn chooses an executive committee from within its ranks to manage the convention when the full board is not in session. The MBCB Executive Committee then elects its own officers. Members of the MBCB Executive Committee for the coming year include:

MBCB EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Chairman
*John H. Pace, Jr., pastor
First Church, Terry*

Vice-Chairman
*Chris Aldridge, pastor
First Church, Winona*

Secretary
*Hardy Denham, member
Main Street Church,
Hattiesburg*

SEE OFFICERS ON P. 8

Revitalization Conf. Feb. 7 at Madison's Broadmoor Church

By William H. Perkins Jr.
Editor

The Mississippi Baptist Convention Board (MBCB) and the North American Mission Board (NAMB) of the Southern Baptist Convention in Alpharetta, Ga., are teaming up in 2013 to provide a church revitalization conference for all Mississippi Baptist churches.

The Church Growth and Revitalization Conference will be held at Broadmoor Church, Madison, on Feb. 7 beginning at 8 a.m., and adjourning at 4 p.m. Johnny Hunt, senior pastor of First Church in Woodstock, Ga., and former two-term president of the Southern Baptist Convention, will lead the conference.

"You would be hard-pressed to find any subject on my heart that I'm more passionate about than church revitalization," said Hunt.

"Last week I attended a meeting in Atlanta to plan for the upcoming Church Growth and Revitalization Conference," said Steve Stone, MBCB associate executive director for church growth. "I went with some vagueness as what the conference is about but left with an affirmation that it will impact our state in a significant way. With two out of three people in our state unchurched, 72% of our churches plateaued or declining, and only five percent of our churches growing, I believe something has to be done — and done now."

The two major issues in revitalization are church health and leadership. This conference will make us aware of the challenge before us but also offer solutions to address our challenges. Pastors are encouraged to bring their

Conference Schedule

8 a.m.	Registration/ Fellowship
9 a.m.	Welcome/Greeting
9:15 a.m.	Session One: Health that Leads to Growth: — Johnny Hunt
10:30 a.m.	Break/Refreshments
10:45 a.m.	Session Two: Leading for Change — Johnny Hunt
Noon	Lunch
1 p.m.	Session Three: MBCB Revitalization Process
2:15 p.m.	Break/Refreshments
2:30 p.m.	Session Four: The Key to Growth — Johnny Hunt
3:45 p.m.	Session Four dismisses
4 p.m.	Adjourn

staffs and lay leaders and together experience the need for revitalization. Together we can see our churches grow and bring Mississippi to Christ."

Stone said the target audiences are pastors, church staffs, and lay leaders. Registration is through the NAMB web site, namb.net/revitalization/. Cost for the conference is \$30 per person and includes registration, conference notebook, lunch, refreshments, and a \$15 LifeWay gift card.

Inside

Directions

Sunday
lessons

Editorial

Bibliography

How to
a Christian

The Ba
Children

Just for the Record 6, 12

Classifieds 5

#BYINFMX *****CAR-R1 LOT#C019
\$0000 2/11 2208#
.005 DTN
SOUTHERN BAPTIST HISTORICAL SOC 5734 PI
701 COMMERCIAL ST STE 401 TN 37203-3620
NASHVILLE JAN 07 2013



From the editor

WILLIAM PERKINS

No better Christmas present

This issue of The Baptist Record closes out yet another extraordinary year in the annals of Mississippi Baptist life, and life in general. Events have transpired in 2012 that we could not have possibly anticipated in the last few days of 2011.

Who could have known that the nation would be mourning the unimaginable loss of 20 young children and seven adults at the hands of a disturbed mass murderer, just days before Christmas?

Life has many ways of surprising us, and shocking us. It seems appropriate to be celebrating the birth of our Lord and Savior in the midst of all the turmoil and tragedy and anxious anticipation for the future, for it is into just such an environment that He came to offer the peace for which the world even today so desperately yearns.

Thus it is supremely sad that the answer to that yearning continues to be rejected in modern times as it was two millennia ago, for He is as willing today as ever to help us (Rev. 3:20). We need only ask Him.

Instead, we stubbornly seek to find our own way. To acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior is to submit to His will for our lives, and we don't want to even think about that. We want what we want, and we want it now. Whether it's a second ice cream cone or the destruction of human life in the womb, we want everything our way. Too often, we believe ourselves to be in charge of our own destiny.

No wonder the human race is in such a mess. As earthly parents are apt to do on a frequent basis, our Heavenly Father has every right to ask, "Didn't I tell you the right way to do this? Didn't I show you the way? Why won't you listen to me?"

The story is told of a farmer who looked outside his bedroom window one bitterly cold evening and spied a flock of disoriented birds in his yard, dying in the huge winter storm that was blowing through the area. He decided he had to save them.

Braving the howling wind and blinding snow, he managed to

open the doors to his spacious, warm barn — but the birds could not comprehend what the kind farmer had done for them. None of them moved.

The farmer got in front of them and tried to lead them into the barn, but they didn't follow. He got behind them and tried to shoe them into the barn, but they only scattered. He shouted at them and waved his arms, but that only made matters worse.

Nothing seemed to help, but then he had an idea. He raced back to the barn and turned on the large, bright light inside. Within a few seconds, a couple of the birds found their way to the light and the safety of the barn. Within a few minutes, more of the birds had reached shelter.

To the farmer's dismay, however, the remainder of the flock stayed right where they were. Trusting their own instincts in the midst of grave danger, they shunned the life-saving light in the barn until it was too late. They died an agonizing death in the snow.

So it is with God and His plans for us. In the midst of our earthly trevails, He opened wide the doors of heaven, but we didn't rush in. He tried to lead us, but we didn't follow. Somehow, we missed all the signals of his concern for us until He turned on the Light (John 8:12).

Christians have seen that Light, and have been saved. Many more people have not seen that Light, though, and will die an agonizing eternal death, frozen in place and not understanding the meaning of the Light offered to them by God.

Can you think of a better present for Jesus' birthday than to show as many people as possible the way to the Light? Without that Light, there is no hope for the lost people of this world. They cannot find their way on their own, yet don't understand the meaning of the Light. Leading them to the Light is a big responsibility (Matt. 28:18-20), but that is what our Lord and Savior has asked us to do.

After what He did for us, it's the least we can do for Him.

New Testament, or Newsweek?

The major festivals of the Christian year often prompt major cover stories in the nation's weekly news magazines. Time, Newsweek, and US News & World Report all regularly featured major articles timed for Christmas and Easter. The days of these cover articles may soon be over, however, since US News & World Report is no longer publishing a print edition, and Newsweek's final print edition will be dated December 31, 2012.

In years past, these cover articles had featured the work of reporters who interviewed a range of scholars and authorities from several theological perspectives. More recently, both Time and Newsweek have instead featured essays written by a single author.

Timed for this Christmas, Newsweek just released a cover essay by Bart D. Ehrman, who is well-known for his belief that the New Testament is largely historical fiction. "Who is Jesus?" is the question on the cover. "The Myths of Jesus" is the headline on the essay itself.

Newsweek's agenda is clear, and it has chosen to feature a cover article denying the historical basis of Christmas as one of its last print editions.

Ehrman begins, predictably, by reviewing the controversy concerning the so-called Gospel of Jesus' Wife that emerged earlier this year when Karen King of Harvard University claimed a tiny papyrus fragment to be a monumental discovery. Even as she insisted that the fragment did not prove in any sense that Jesus had a wife, she fueled the confusion in carefully-staged media appearances in which she referred to the fragment as, "The Gospel of Jesus' Wife."

A professor at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, Ehrman's academic specialization is in the history of the New Testament and its times. As such, he dismissed the papyrus fragment as either irrelevant or a hoax. He writes, "As it turns out, most experts on early Christianity have come to think the fragment is a hoax, a forgery produced in recent years by an amateur who, unlike King and scholars of her stature,



Guest opinion

with R. Albert Mohler Jr.

was not well versed in the niceties of Coptic grammar and so was unable to cover up the traces of his own deceit."

A close look at that statement reveals a strong critique of King who, according to Ehrman's logic, should have been able to detect problems with a papyrus fragment probably manufactured by an amateur.

Ehrman cites that controversy, however, in order to make the point that there were hundreds of "proto-gospels" about Jesus floating about in the first few centuries of the Christian church, and that much of what modern people think they know about Christmas is actually not to be found in the New Testament. He rightly states, "As Christians around the world now prepare to celebrate Jesus' birth, it is worth considering that much of the 'common knowledge' about the babe in Bethlehem cannot be found in any scriptural authority, but is either a modern myth or based on Gospel accounts from outside the sacred bounds of Christian Scripture."

That is profoundly true, of course. The New Testament tells us that Jesus was born in unusual circumstances and placed in a manger because "there was no room in the inn." There is no inn-keeper in the New Testament, however. There is no record of the number of the magi, no reference to Dec. 25 as the date of Christ's birth, and no mention of barnyard animals much less a little drumming boy.

Beyond these rather familiar matters, Ehrman also points to a host of claims about Jesus, Mary, Joseph, and the larger Christmas story that amount

see MOHLER on p. 8

BaptistRecord

Editor

William H. Perkins Jr.
wperkins@mrbch.org

Associate Editor

Tony Martin
tmartin@mrbch.org

Layout/Design

Megan Young
myoung@mrbch.org

Advertising

Emily Jones
ejones@mrbch.org

Circulation Manager

Barbara Quattbaum
bquattbaum@mrbch.org

Editor Emeritus

Don McGregor

Baptist Record

Advisory Committee:

Dwayne Parker, Flora

Paul Sims, Pontotoc

Barry Burris, Terry

Cari White, Meridian

Billie Buckley, Petal

Russell Mord, Sturgis

Sent news, communication, and address changes to: The Editor, Baptist Record, P.O. Box 530, Jackson, MS 39205-0530.

Tel: (601) 966-3800
Fax: (601) 292-1330
E-mail: baptistrecord@mrbch.org

BAPTISTS

VOLUME 136 • NUMBER 50 • ISSN 0005-5778
Published weekly except weeks of July 4 and Christmas by the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board, 515 Mississippi Street, Jackson, MS 39201. Subscription \$10.35 per year payable in advance. Economy plan available for cooperating Mississippi churches. Periodicals postage paid at Jackson, MS. Member, Association of State Baptist Papers. Deadlines: News items — one calendar week prior to requested publication date. Advertising — two calendar weeks prior to requested publication date. All submissions are subject to editing.

Miss. Baptists on scene of school shooting

NEWTOWN, Conn. (BP and local reports) — Three Mississippi Baptists have arrived in the Newtown, Ct., area to minister on a chaplaincy basis in response to the mass shooting Dec. 14 at Sandy Hook Elementary School that claimed the lives of 20 children and six adults, as well as the shooter's mother at her nearby residence.

John Temple, pastor of Poplar Springs Drive Church in Meridian; Kay Cassibry, member of Morrison Heights Church, Clinton, and executive director of the Mississippi Woman's Missionary Union (WMU); and Donna Swarts, member of Goodwater Church in Magee, and former Mississippi WMU president, flew into Hartford (Ct.) and were on the ground in Newtown on Monday morning.

A request for assistance was made to the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board through the disaster relief office of the North American Mission Board (NAMB) of the Southern Baptist Convention in Alpharetta, Ga. NAMB had received a request for assistance from Connecticut Baptists.

Contacted via cell phone on the afternoon of Dec. 17, Cassibry said Southbury Church, a Southern Baptist church about 15 miles from the scene of the shooting, is serving as a command post for the Baptist response to the tragedy.

"We're working with local Baptists on immediate and long-term responses to the needs of the people here. John Temple is working on the plans for first responders. Donna Swarts is on the children's strategy team. She and I are both on the women's team, and since I am a former first grade teacher, I was placed on the team that will be drawing up plans for the teachers."

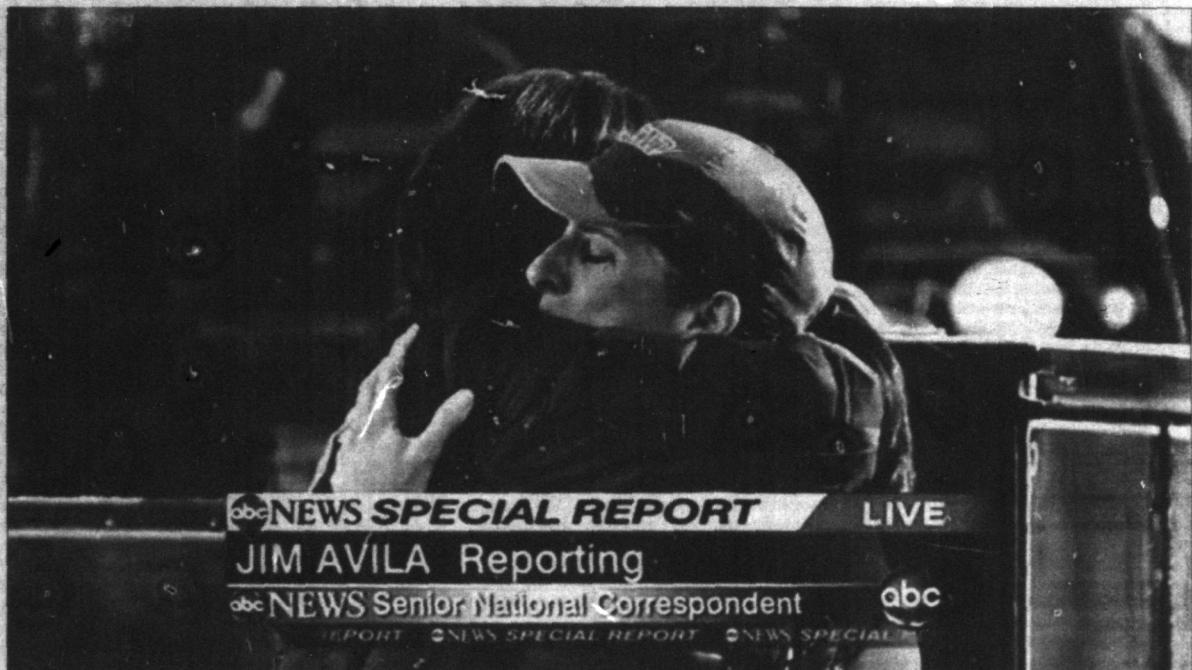
Temple is a chaplain for the Lauderdale County Sheriff's Office. Swarts is a child care specialist who administers the child care program for the Mississippi Baptist Disaster Relief Task Force.

Local school officials announced plans to move the Sandy Hook students to an unused school nearby on Tuesday. Cassibry said the chaplaincy teams were scrambling to meet that need and other requests that have been streaming in to the teams.

Cassibry also said sympathy cards and notes of condolence can be sent to Sandy Hook Elementary School, 39 Main Street, Newtown, CT 06470.

Local churches reach out

Bryan Sims, pastor of Southbury Church, said hours after the tragedy he was contacting church members to see if any of



them were directly impacted.

A resident from the Newtown area has been visiting Southbury Church for a few months, Sims said.

"We're all very grieved, definitely praying for those who are going through that down in Newtown. It's such a tragedy. It's one thing when it's adults, but when it's little children being killed, it's just hard to fathom," Sims said.

"I've emailed everybody in the church and put it on our church Facebook page that... I'm here to talk, pray if anybody needs to. I'm kind of gauging the response right now. I'm not sure if people want to come to the church or if they want to be with their families right now."

Itamar Maciel, interim pastor of the Spanish-language-speaking All Nations Church, a Southern Baptist plant in nearby Danbury, said his church sponsored a community prayer meeting on Saturday in response to the tragedy. He said the children of his 100 members are likely enrolled in public schools in Danbury, rather than Sandy Hook Elementary School.

Sims said Southbury Church could itself use prayer to know the best way to respond to the tragedy. "We're just here to reach out to anybody we can," Sims said.

Mark Angerosa, interim director of missions for the Western Connecticut Baptist Association in Harwinton, said he will work across denominational lines to access the need for assistance, even as the association is still responding to Connecti-

cum's damage from October's Hurricane Sandy.

"It's still very early to tell," Angerosa said. "There are some... very large churches in that area. In the evangelical community in Connecticut, we tend to work across denominational lines where it's helpful, and we'll certainly see if we can get on board with anything they are doing in that area already."

Angerosa said any outreach could be an extension of disaster relief already underway in response to Sandy. "We've just had some people in our association trained for disaster relief, through the Baptist Convention of New England, and we're gearing ourselves up to assist with the recovery from Hurricane Sandy, which is still a great need in Connecticut, New York, and New Jersey, so it is very possible that we could take some with chaplaincy training and make them available to those in Newtown if they have need of such. It's been a very difficult few months with the hurricane and now this tragedy is just devastating."

'It hits home'

Lisa Siedlecki, director of communications for the mega five-campus Walnut Hill (non-denominational) Community Church, said many of the families in Newtown attend Walnut Hill's Danbury campus. The church had just held an emergency planning meeting in response to the tragedy when Baptist Press spoke with Siedlecki.

"It hits home here. We have families there, but our fami-

lies are, I think right now, all accounted for, which is good" Siedlecki said through tears. There are a few we haven't heard about so we have pastors out there now. We've had pastors there since early this morning. We've got a team there now ministering to the families."

Walnut Hill Church cancelled Friday's Christmas musical to hold instead a prayer service, she said. "We are opening our doors up to the community for prayer [Friday] tonight. We've also got pastors mobilized in our prayer room and chapel for people who ... need to come and be prayed for. We've engaged the counselors we work with, at a Christian counseling center in Danbury, which is kind of our hub town in our region."

"What I can tell you is... everybody is just devastated to the core," she said. "The people who live in Newtown come to our main campus that's been there for 30 years. Everybody's wrecked... We can't begin to even predict what the long-term effect is going to be."

Motive unknown

Former Sandy Hook Elementary School student Adam Lanza, 20, has been identified by police officials as the shooter. His motive for the massacre is still unknown. Early reports from officials indicated he had been diagnosed early in life with Asperger's Syndrome.

According to a National Institutes of Health fact sheet, Asperger's Syndrome is an autism spectrum disorder, one of a distinct group of complex neurodevelopment disorders char-

acterized by social impairment, communication difficulties, and restrictive, repetitive, and stereotyped patterns of behavior.

"There really is no clear association between Asperger's and violent behavior," psychologist Elizabeth Laugeson, an assistant clinical professor at the University of California, Los Angeles, told USA Today after the mass shooting.

Settling in for long term

Angerosa said he will continue to contact churches in the area to access how Southern Baptists can respond. "There's going to be an awful lot of personnel there, both Christian and secular, so the important thing I think is being able to find out what exactly the needs are," he said.

"Right now, they're in shock and the initial grieving process is going to be huge. It's going to be community-wide. Until we connect with some of the churches there and find out what their needs are, it's hard to know exactly what we can do."

"I have found oftentimes people want to go immediately when they hear that there is a problem or tragedy or disaster, but sometimes it's good to take a step back, try to make connections with people, and get a good feel for what's really happening before just rushing in."

William H. Perkins Jr., editor of *The Baptist Record*, and Tony Martin, associate editor, contributed to this article.

Living in a world that seems to be in so many different ways headed in the wrong direction, you would hope that Christmas time would be a great time for things to turn around. Pick out whatever dimension of society that you want to look at, examine it, and you will probably come to the conclusion that in that part of our world we are in a mess. Just think about it! Economically, politically, morally, criminally, emotionally, relationally, academically, and the list could go on for a long while because almost anywhere that you turn there are problems to be dealt with and people are struggling. Wouldn't it be great if Christmas could be a time when things turn around?

Christmas is a wonderful time to stop and think about the changes that you need to make, and I am not just talking about changes in the New Year just around the corner. I am talking about a time to stop, evaluate, and turn things around in a different fashion. I heard a guy telling that this year he has changed his whole approach to gift giving to his kids, grandkids, and to other people in his family. All he is going to give them is batteries. He is going to give batteries of every size - D, C, A, AA, and AAA batteries. He is going to wrap them up in a box and put a tag on it that says, "Toys not included." It is this kind of a "turn around on batteries not included" thing that most of us face around Christmas time.

What should we do and what would be a good thing that we might do to turn Christmas around? It has gotten to be where every Christmas there is a new war to be fought in various facets of society about Christmas itself. We are not allowed to have manger scenes displayed on any public grounds and even on some private grounds. We can no longer have a Christmas parade or a Christmas tree. It is all just generic winter stuff with a holiday ring.

Here in our capital city we cannot have a Christmas parade, but rather it is a holiday parade. When asked why and what the change was all about, the Mayor somewhat dismissed the whole idea and said that some people should not get so concerned about the name of Christ being taken out of the celebration as though that would actually affect their faith. He was very evasive about the holiday parade. I thought to myself that if a name is not important, would it make any difference if his name was taken out of the mayor's office. That is a different story all together, but it is true that names do mean something. The holiday season is about Christmas. It does speak volumes that He, who was not born in the inn because there was no room, keeps being put out in the stable in our day as well. Be that as it may, let me speak to your heart and



Christmas Turn Around

to mine about those things that possibly can turn around and make a difference in us whether it makes a difference in anyone else or not.

For one thing we can have a Christmas turn around if we would focus on what we can give rather than what we can get. If you listen to all of the talk and watch all of the ads we are bombarded with, you would think that the most wonderful thing in the entire world would be the receiving of gifts. All of us are encouraged to want, to dream, and to have a wish list. We think, ponder, and anticipate getting good things. We feed our own greed and encourage it in others. Surely there is a certain amount of joy and delight that comes in being the recipient of a gift. However, if Jesus was correct, and He was; He said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35).

You do not have to be rich to give, and it does not have to be a big or an expensive item that is given, but it is more blessed to give than it is to receive. I must also confess that I have watched so many of God's wonderful children look, pray, and desire to be gift givers and find beautiful expressions of giving that became significant in their lives. It may be helping a family in distress. It may be a gift to a total stranger. It may be participating in the largest mission offering that is collected annually in the United States known as the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for International Missions. It is a joy to give.

Every December, I receive a stack of requests from institutions, ministries, and areas of special work that are appealing for end of the year expressions of giving. I understand, and I have a deep appreciation for so many of these areas of opportunity and give to many of them. Your church may be in great need of additional support during these difficult days of financial shortfalls and economic downturns. You can provide help for many of the needy

things in the work of God. It is a blessing to give, and even as you think about giving beyond your days here you can be such a blessing. It is not just about end of year giving; it is about end of life giving. Have you thoughtfully arranged for some of your inheritance to be used in Kingdom work?

Several months ago I received notification from an attorney here in our state. He was serving as the executor of a will disbursing the estate of one of dear Baptist ladies who had gone on to be with the Lord. As a part of her will, she wanted to leave an amount that would be sent to the International Mission Board for the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering. Weeks later I received a check that has already been processed and sent forward for over \$47,000.00. What a thoughtful, gracious, and God honoring thing to include a part of that which you will not ever use to be placed in the hands of those who are telling others about Jesus. If we could learn to give and not just get, there are so many areas of Kingdom work where we could be a lasting part of their ministry even beyond our life here.

A second turn around event that we could have at Christmas would take place when we focus on what is important and not just on what is indebted. It is impossible for people not to pay attention to the condition of our country as our debt grows to astronomical proportions. Trillions stack on top of trillions on top of trillions, and we keep borrowing. But while the national condition is a subject of a lot of conversation and worry, sadly it is the same condition that so many of our folks are in personally. Christmas has become a spending spree with no limits for too many of our people. Of course, there are limitations the consequences of which we may not see until January or February when the bills from the use of the plastic cards arrive in our mailboxes. Even then, as shocking as they may be, we just keep on spending. Sadly, many people think that

they can spend their way into prosperity. Logically that is impossible and in reality, it brings home poverty.

We cannot continue personally on a road of life that simply demands instantaneous personal gratification for whatever we want. In time, we will overrun our debt limits and the debt coupled with the interest to be paid begins to exact huge sums, not only of money but of life itself. I think about the first Christmas and the arrival of Jesus in Bethlehem resting in a manger. As poor and desolate as that may seem, the people who were attracted to Him from the announcement from heaven were poor people. But they were poor people who were able to see what was really important, and they came and found Mary, Joseph, and the Babe lying in a manger. They found God's Son. They found the greatest thing that human beings can experience and that is a relationship with God and others. That is what is important.

One final thought about a Christmas turn around is that we might give attention to the thought that we ought to be decorated rather than just put out the decorations.

As I write this article, I have seen all of the decorations around the neighborhood and throughout the city that have gone up and as the day wears on and night falls the lights are blinking, the sounds of bells can be heard, and the bows and garland are all wonderful. But to be decorated is an even more wonderful thing. In Titus 2:10, Paul is talking about how servants ought to be, and in some ways all of us have responsibilities in serving others. This is what Paul said, "That they may adorn the doctrine of God, our Savior, in all things." When Paul said that these people need to adorn the doctrine of God, he was literally saying to them that their lives should add beauty to beauty.

I suppose that is what people think a tree, garland, and shining ornaments do as they add beauty to beauty. Paul was talking about their lives and the great glorious thing that God has provided for us in Jesus. Our lives literally will add decoration and beauty to the salvation Jesus came to give us. What if, at this Christmas Season, all of God's people were prone to stop and thank Him for what He has done for us, and then we would turn around and live out what He has brought to us? It would, in fact, add beauty to beauty. It would adorn the doctrine of God, our Savior. Let this Christmas be a turn around event in your life and to each and every one of you, Merry Christmas and glory to God, who made it all possible.

The author can be contacted at jfutral@mrbcb.org.

Submission Guidelines

The Baptist Record is pleased to publish news and photographs of special events that take place in cooperating churches of the Mississippi Baptist Convention.

News submitted for publication in The Baptist Record must be either (a) typewritten, (b) neatly printed on 8 1/2 by 11-inch paper, or (c) neatly printed on standardized forms provided by the newspaper. All articles must be received in writing; no articles will be accepted over the telephone.

News may be submitted electronically to the address below, and must be contained in the mes-

sage segment of an e-mail form. Due to increasing virus threats, no text attachments will be accepted. Photograph attachments are permissible.

Please make articles concise. Include the who, what, when, where details of the story, along with contact person's address and telephone number.

Photographs may be color or black and white. Instant photos and digital printouts are not reproducible. Digital photos may be used if submitted as a JPEG file via either e-mail, CD or DVD. Photos must be clear, sharp, and well-lit. Cell phone photographs and other low resolution items are generally not publishable. Photographs can not be returned. Please do not attach photos with tape or staples.

All news items are subject to editing, and all photographs are subject to cropping. Photographs must depict people. No landscape-, building-, or object-only photographs will be printed. News items and/or photographs can be published one time only. News items and/or photographs depicting benefits and activities for secular or outside organizations will not be published. Deadline for submitting news is one week prior to requested publication date.

Articles that are not date-sensitive will be published on a space-available basis.

Submit news and photographs to The Baptist Record, P.O. Box 530, Jackson, MS 39205-0530. FAX: (601) 292-3330. E-mail: baptistrecord@mrbcb.org.

No Baptist Record on Dec. 27

Due to postal regulations that limit The Baptist Record to 50 issues per year, the newspaper will not publish on December 27. The next issue of The Baptist Record will be dated January 3. The staff of The Baptist Record thanks you for your support of this ministry of information during 2012, and would like to wish you a joyous Christmas and a Happy New Year.

CLASSIFIEDS

FULL-TIME SENIOR PASTOR: Beech Haven Baptist Church of Athens, GA is seeking an ordained Baptist pastor. If you meet the criteria stated at www.beechhaven.org and wish to apply, send a résumé and cover letter by 1/11/2013 describing why you want to be considered as a candidate (bhbcpc@gmail.com).

WINDOW AND SCREEN SHOP — windows and storm windows built to fit your opening. Plus new window screens and rescreen old screens. Call 601-709-4879.

NORRIS BOOKBINDING COMPANY, INC., OLD BIBLES REBOUND. Also, church bulletins and hymnals. For more information call 662 453-7424 or fax us at 662-455-6743.

CURCH PEW UPHOLSTERY, FREE ESTIMATES. Davis Upholstery, Quitman, Miss., phone 601-776-6617.

GATLINBURG RENTALS: Cabin \$90/nite and Condo \$70/nite. Contact: 832 922 0401 or E-mail: pdw4760@att.net for information and booking.

GET THE BEST RATES ON: Health insurance and Medicare Supplements. Call 1-800-541-8196 or visit www.TurnerInsuranceOnline.com

WANT A GOOD GROUP OF CHRISTIAN WOMEN TO ENTERTAIN AT YOUR NEXT SENIOR CITIZENS GROUP? Call the Kagger Roos, a wash tub band. We sing, tell jokes, and play instruments. Call us at 601-857-0736.

SEBREN'S SIDING www.sebrenhomeimprovement.com. Christian owned Don & Rita Sebren. 601-992-2092. All home improvements, siding, energy efficient windows, metal & shingle roofs, screen & sunrooms, patio covers, decks, room additions, kitchen & bath upgrades.

STAINED GLASSWORKS, INC., serving MS & AL since 1992. Call 800-805-2970

GET AWAY AT BETSY'S LIL' CABINS call for brochure 601-940-6841.

STAINED GLASS: new windows and repairs. Hopper Stained Glass, Jackson, 601-502-0202.

Need a light?

Jesus said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life." (John 8:12)

Simply share the following prayer with God in your own words:

1. Lord, I admit that I need you. (I have sinned.)
2. I want forgiveness for my sins and freedom from eternal death. (I repent.)
3. I believe Jesus died and rose from the grave to forgive my sins and to restore my relationship with you. (I believe in Jesus.)
4. By faith, I invite Jesus Christ into my life. From this time on, I want to live in a loving relationship with Him. (I receive Christ as my Savior and Lord.)

"But as many as received him, to them he gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in his name." (John 3:12)

If you make a decision for Christ today, contact a local Southern Baptist church for spiritual guidance.

Miss. Baptist churches eligible for utilities sales tax exemption

By Rob Chambers
Correspondent

Churches that have a 501(c)3, non-profit tax status have been eligible since July 1 for a sales tax exemption on church building utilities such as electric, gas (natural and LPG), and water.

These tax exemptions are not automatic. Each church must provide proof of their tax-exempt status to the appropriate utility provider. Two methods can be used to provide this proof of tax status to their utility companies. Most churches will likely find the first method preferable.

The first method is to submit an Affidavit of Church Purchasing Utilities to the appropriate church utility provider. Note that this affidavit expires on December 31 of each year. If a church has already submitted an affidavit to utility providers for 2012 tax exemptions, the church must also submit new affidavits to receive exemptions in 2013.

The affidavit forms must be notarized and signed by a representative of the church. In many churches this representative will be the chairman of the trustees, but it could be someone else who has been granted

this authority by the congregation. The Mississippi Department of Revenue has produced an affidavit form that churches can use. It can be downloaded at the website, www.christianaction.com/index.php/resources/O95.

The second method is likely to be more involved since it requires the church to produce a "determination letter" from the U.S. Internal Revenue Service indicating the church's 501(c)3 tax-exempt status. Most Southern Baptist churches in Mississippi do not possess this determination letter, but such a letter is not necessary since the affidavit method described above is sufficient. In the event your church has a determination letter, then provide a copy of this letter to the appropriate utility provider to receive the utility sales tax exemption. Otherwise, submit the affidavit forms to the appropriate utility provider.

Also, place on your church calendar this order of business as a reminder to submit these affidavit forms every December for the following year.

Chambers is a consultant for the Christian Action Commission of the Mississippi Baptist Convention. He can be contacted at rchambers@christianaction.com.

ERLC, others oppose advancement of legislation to legalize online gambling

WASHINGTON (BP) — The Southern Baptist Convention's ethics entity and other gambling foes are speaking out against legislation to legalize online poker that is a threat to gain U.S. Senate

passage before the end of the year.

Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, D-Nev., and conservative Sen. Jon Kyl, R-Ariz., have drafted a bill that reportedly would legalize Internet gambling on poker. They have yet to introduce the proposal, but opponents are concerned Reid may attach it to must-pass legislation that would receive a vote before the lame-duck session closes at the end of the year.

The Southern Baptist Convention's Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission (ERLC) "steadfastly opposes your efforts," the entity's president, Richard Land, told Kyl in a Dec. 5 letter.

"We cannot support any effort that grants government sanction to any form of gambling," Land said. "Your bill not only does that but also creates a regulatory mechanism that is certain to be used to introduce other forms of Internet gambling in the future. No amount of regulation or taxation could make such legalization a winning proposition for America."

The National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) also has expressed its opposition to the Reid-Kyl proposal. "Pastors regularly see the destructive impact of gambling on families and children," NAE President Leith Anderson said in a Dec. 11 statement. "Those problems will increase if gambling moves from buildings to home computers."

The online poker bill would weaken a 2006 federal law designed to bar most Internet gambling, Land told Kyl. That measure, the Unlawful Internet Gambling Enforcement Act, requires financial institutions

to block credit card and other payments to online wagering businesses, which primarily are located overseas.

Gambling foes, with the agreement of the U.S. Justice Department at the time, argued a 1961 law that prohibited wagering over telephone wires also barred Internet wagering.

Proponents of online gambling gained impetus for their efforts when a late 2011 opinion by the U.S. Justice Department contended the 2006 law applies only to sports betting. Georgia and Illinois are now selling lottery draw tickets on the Internet, and other state legislatures are considering bills to legalize online gambling. The Wall Street Journal reported Dec. 5.

Kyl, who supported the 2006 law, believes the new legislation will help limit the spread of gambling, according to The Journal.

Foes of his bill disagree. "This is being disguised as a protective bill, if you will, that would limit gambling, but in fact... this is just a precursor bill" to opening the Internet to casino gambling a few years from now, said Chad Hills, Focus on the Family's gambling analyst, in a Dec. 11 online interview.

The proposal would aid Reid's home state, Nevada, its opponents contend. The directors of state lotteries are even working to defeat the legislation. Only Nevada is set up to license Internet poker operators, a state lottery defender told the Las Vegas Review-Journal. The state directors also argue federal legislation is unneeded, since their lotteries are able to regulate Internet gambling.

www.lambsbooklist.com

JOIN "THE LIST"
A list of Christian Businesses
and Professionals
Advertising Their Business

Just for the Record

CONCORD CHURCH, BENTON-TIPPAH ASSOCIATION, honored the church's veterans Nov. 10. Shown, from left, are Lyle Bullock, T.C. Mauney, Ricky Jordan, Darryl Crawford, Jerry Mauney, and Larry Gailor.



MT. OLIVE CHURCH, RIPLEY, honored veterans Nov. 11. Shown are Vernon Jones, pastor Terry Vancanenor, and Lynwood Shackelford.



The Food-Fun-Fellowship group of **GOSS CHURCH, COLUMBIA**, rode the Marion County train from the Expo Center in Columbia Oct. 9. Mark McArthur, pastor.



PLEASANT HILL CHURCH, TIPPAH COUNTY, youth presented their Christmas program Dec. 9.

In other Church News:

► **Park Haven Church, Laurel**, is hosting a New Year's Eve sing with Plainway Church and Centerpoint Christian Church from 7-10 p.m. Hearts of Desire and other guest singers performing.



CALvary CHURCH, OXFORD, ordained Kevin Kilcrease to the gospel ministry Dec. 2. Shown, from left, are Corie Kilcrease, Kilcrease, and David Ard.

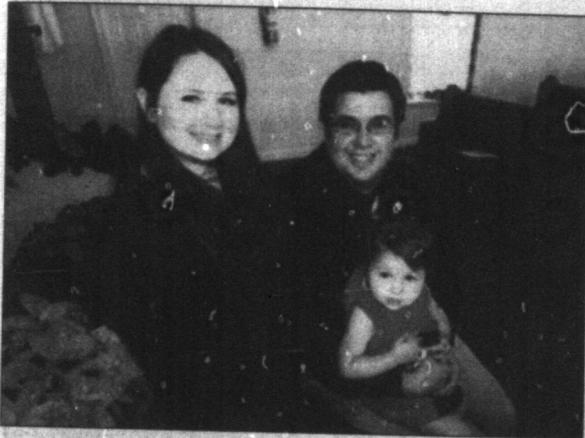


DORSEY CHURCH, MOOREVILLE, held a baby dedication Oct. 7. Shown are Cohen, Ed, Britni, Charlie, and Ellie York.



The Team Kid club of **SKENE CHURCH, SKENE**, visited the Indywood nursing home Dec. 2 to sing Christmas carols and distribute gifts to the residents.

Staff Changes



OLD RICE ROAD CHURCH, Madison, has called James Davis as minister of students and college. Davis was raised in Brandon and graduated from Mississippi College in 2009 with a degree in Christian Studies. He is shown with his wife JoAnna and daughter, Abigail Grace.



CALVARY CHURCH, PETAL, has called William (Bill) Burk of Estill Springs, Tenn., as their Pastor. Burk is coming to Calvary from Cross Roads Baptist Church in Estill Springs, having pastored in that church for three years. He was called to the ministry in 1997 and has also served as Senior Pastor at Midway Church in Baxley, Ga. and at Pine Cliff Baptist Church in Camilla, Ga. He is a graduate of Luther Rice University, receiving a Master of Arts in Biblical Studies in 2007 and a Master of Divinity in 2009. He also attended New Orleans Seminary. He is married to the former Deborah Shoemaker of Runnelstown. The Burks have 4 children; James, Amy, Emily and Daniel. Shown, from top right, clockwise, are Burk, Amy, Daniel, and Emily; Debbie, center.



Johnny Hunt
Pastor
First Baptist Church
Woodstock, GA



Phil Hoskins
Pastor
Higher Ground Baptist Church
Kingsport, TN



Junior Hill
Evangelist
Hartsville, AL



This Hope
First Baptist Church
Woodstock, GA



MID SOUTH MEN'S BIBLE CONFERENCE

February 22-23, 2013

Faith Baptist Church, Bartlett, Tennessee

Go to www.myfaithbaptist.org
for registration and information



Tommy King, president of **WILLIAM CAREY UNIVERSITY**, is shown telling the Christmas story as members of the Carey Chorale light candles, preparing to lead a candlelight procession to WCU's Chain Garden, following the annual Christmas Vespers and Hanging of the Green service held in Smith Auditorium on December 6.



WILLIAM CAREY UNIVERSITY'S Wendy Hogue, head softball coach, Anna-Lauren Fontenot of Waynesboro, a senior softball player, Tommy King, president of WCU, Alex Lahasky of Overland Park, Kan., a senior baseball player, and Bobby Halford, head baseball coach, are shown before the Halbrook Awards Luncheon held at the Hattiesburg Lake Terrace Convention Center on October 2. Fontenot and Lahasky were recognized for receiving David M. Halbrook Awards during the luncheon, which was part of the 79th annual Mississippi Association of Colleges and Universities (MAC) Conference hosted by WCU October 1-2.

In other College News:

► **Mississippi College** will host the Youth Evangelism Challenge sponsored by the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board on Thursday, December 27 and Friday, December 28. Worship will be led by Bethany Barr-Phillips, and conference speakers will be Gary Permenter and Bryant Bush. Pre-registration cost for the event is \$10 per person. Registrations after December 14th and walk-up registrations at the conference will be \$15 per person. The registration form as well as additional information can be found at www.mbc.org or by contacting the Evangelism Department at (601) 292-3278.

► **Mississippi College's** academic programs received the approval of one of the nation's premier accreditation agencies. At a conference in Dallas Dec. 12, the Southern Association of Colleges and Universities reaffirmed MC programs as part of a lengthy review occurring on campuses in the 11-state region every ten years.

MOHLER

cont. from p.2

to "legends and fabrications" that are rightly recognized as implausible and untrue.

Ehrman then turns to press his case on the New Testament itself, however. After reviewing a number of traditions and non-biblical accounts, he asks: "Are the stories about Jesus' birth that are in the New Testament any less unbelievable?" He then says that the answer to that question "depends on whom you ask." To leave no doubt, Ehrman answers the question directly in his essay. The New Testament writings "are not historically reliable descriptions of what really happened when Jesus was born," he asserts.

Ehrman juxtaposes those who are "interested in affirming the narratives of Scripture" and those who are more interested in "knowing what actually happened in the past."

He then explains, "And there is indeed a very wide swath of scholars — Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, agnostic, and others — who have a very different view of the accounts of Jesus' birth in the New Testament and who realize that there are problems with the traditional stories as they are recounted for us in Matthew and Luke, the only two Gospels that contain infancy narratives. However valuable these writings may be for theological reflection on the meaning and importance of Jesus — and why should anyone deny that they are tremendously valuable for that? — they are not the sorts of historical sources that we might hope for if we are seriously engaged in trying to reconstruct the events of history."

In other words, Ehrman

argues that Matthew and Luke simply can't be trusted to convey historical truth. He points to what he insists are inconsistencies and erroneous historical claims, arguing that though some try to explain these questions in an attempt to affirm the veracity of the Gospels, it is better just to abandon them altogether if you are "seriously engaged in trying to reconstruct the events of history."

Just as a practical matter, a reading of Bart Ehrman's many books, along with similar efforts, reveals that those who claim to abandon the New Testament in order to "reconstruct the events of history" find themselves coming back to the New Testament again and again. The reason for this is simple — there are no comparable sources.

Ehrman reveals his real agenda in the sentence that follows his denial of the historical truthfulness of the New Testament. He asserts, "For some Christian believers that is a problem; for others, it is a liberation, as it frees the believer from having to base faith on the uncertainties provided by the imperfect historical record and the fallible historians who study it."

In Ehrman's view, liberation comes in freeing the believer from a faith based in the claims of the New Testament, or in any historical record, for that matter. The interesting point about Ehrman's proposed path of liberation for Christian believers is the fact that Ehrman is himself no longer a believer. He was once a conservative evangelical, but now describes himself as an agnostic who has left the church.

Like many others, Ehrman tries to argue that the New Testament is still useful for "theological reflection on the meaning and importance of Jesus." He asks, "And why

should anyone deny that they are tremendously valuable for that?"

The New Testament does not present itself merely for the purpose of theological reflection. It makes unvarnished historical claims and direct statements of fact. Ehrman attempts to sidestep this truth, stating that the New Testament contains writings identified as "gospels" rather than "histories," but the word "history" in that sense is a fairly modern invention.

The Gospels do contain interpretation and theological elaboration, but all four Gospels, including Matthew and Luke, contain explicit and pervasive historical material — the bedrock historical claims of Christianity itself.

Christianity stands or falls on the truth concerning Jesus, and thus it also stands or falls on the authority and truthfulness of the Bible. What you believe about historical truth defines what you believe about Jesus Christ. Without the revealed truths of the New Testament, there is no Christianity, just superstitions and fantasies about Jesus.

Interestingly, Bart Ehrman does believe that Jesus existed. In a recent book he debunks those who dismiss all claims about Christ as mere myth. He believes Jesus to have been a Jewish apocalyptic prophet, but not God incarnate in human flesh.

The cover article in the magazine, timed for maximum publicity at Christmas, was a premeditated act. Securing Bart Ehrman to write the essay set the course, and the cover art is intended to sell the magazine.

In the waning days of Newsweek as a print magazine, the editors decided to take on the New Testament. Readers should note carefully that it is Newsweek, and not the New Testament, that is going out of print.

gia Baptist Convention. This column first appeared at his website, AlbertMohler.com, and appears here courtesy of Baptist Press.

BIBLIOCRYPT

LNC FTBOO PVLNCTCLN, LNC ESUPCT

EBACLH; DKL LNC PUTA UE UKT FUA

ONBSS OLBRA EUT CJCT.

VOBVBN EUTLM: CVNL

Clue: F = G

Have fun with cryptography and exercise your Bible knowledge. A King James Version Bible verse has been encoded by letter substitution. The same letter is substituted throughout the puzzle. Solve by trial and error. Answer to last week's puzzle: Hosea Nine: Five

By Charles Marx, 1932-2004, © 2005

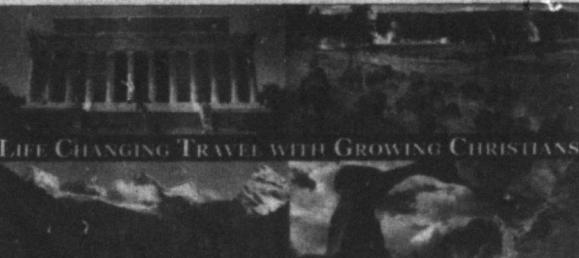
MSA audio LLC

Design & Integration of Professional Audio, Video, & Lighting
Church, Conference Room, School
Equipment sales, service and installation

Trooper Hales
info@msaudioilc.com

P.O. Box 1575
Clinton, MS 39060

Ph 601-923-9947
Fax 601-924-2880



LIFE CHANGING TRAVEL WITH GROWING CHRISTIANS

CD or IRA Maturing?

7.00%
First Year
GUARANTEED
Includes First Year Bonus

Learn the Safe & Secure Way
to Earn Stock Market Linkage
Returns Without Market Risk
to Your Principal

L.D. O'Mire

Financial Services

1-800-844-3254

FROM 14 STATES AGE 40 AND UP

- Biblical creation tours of Grand Staircase, Yellowstone, Alaska and Canadian Rockies, or Pacific Northwest
- Christian heritage tours of Washington D.C. or New England
- Atlantic Canada
- Many more all expenses included tours
- "Friendliest travelers ever" from 14 states
- Luxury coach with extra leg room and wireless sound system

CALL 601-371-8733 FOR NEW 2013 CATALOG
LIVE AND TO TALK TO GUIDE

Better yet, come to our open house in Jackson, MS where we'll show you our beautiful group tour and budget friendly travel packages.

SATURDAY, JANUARY 12 FROM 10 A.M. - 3 P.M.

MS AGRICULTURAL MUSEUM
200 SCADS LANE \$25 PP

PURPOSE DRIVEN TOURS

OFFICERS

cont. from p.1

Weldon Aultman, member
First Church, Indianola

Matt Buckles, pastor
First Church, Vicksburg

Clarence Cooper, pastor
Brandon Church, Brandon

Bobby Kirk, member
Roundaway Church
Doddsville

Russell Mord, pastor
Sturgis Church, Sturgis

Gene Neal, pastor
First Church, Quitman

Shawn Parker, pastor
First Church, Columbus

Jim Phillips, pastor
North Greenwood Church
Greenwood

Gary Richardson, pastor
North Oxford Church
Oxford

Allen Simpson, pastor
First Church, Amory

Lloyd Sweatt, pastor
Meadowood Church,
Amory

Mark Vincent, pastor
Clarke Venable Church
Decatur

Rex Yancey, pastor
First Church, Ripley

Ex Officio
David Hamilton, pastor
West Heights Church
Pontotoc
(MBC President)

Jim Futral
Executive Director
MBCB, Jackson

THE VILLAGE VIEW



Dr. Rory Lee, Executive Director
P.O. Box 27
Clinton, MS 39060-0027
(601) 922-2242

www.baptistchildrensvillage.com

GIFTS OF HONOR AND MEMORY

A portion of The Village View is allocated each month to a list of Gifts of Honor and Memory. Many groups and individuals elect to pay tribute to others through this sensitive, meaningful, and helpful medium. This feature is hopefully designed to further honor, with taste and respect, those who are and have been special to our special friends.

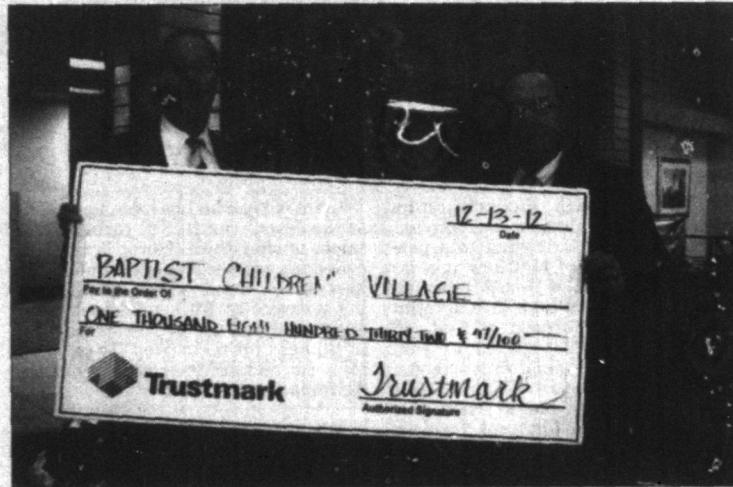
OCTOBER 27 - NOVEMBER 15, 2012

MEMORIALS

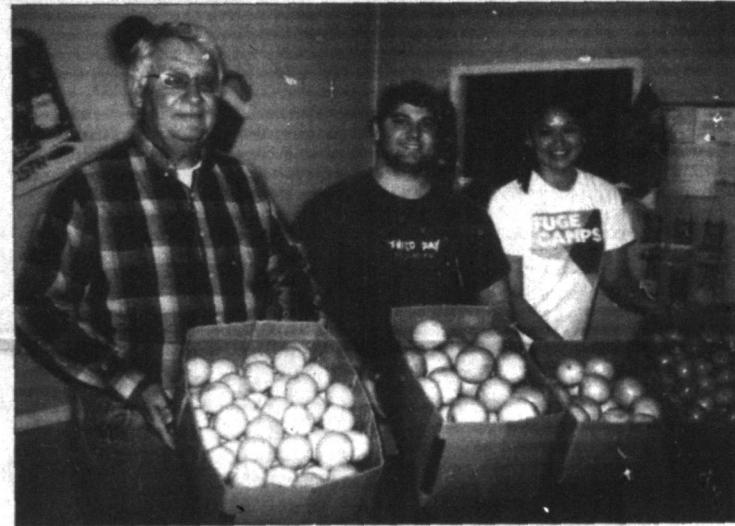
Ann Walker Manning
Joy Huggins
Sunflower BC
Dr. Chester Masterson
Mr. & Mrs. Harry K. Woods
William "Bill" Mackay
Katherine B. Hester
Mr. Wendell McDowell
Homemakers SSC,
Calvary BC
Ethel B. McKinley
Glen & Annette Fortenberry
William N. "Bill" Montgomery
Personnel Dept. MSH
Mrs. Gertrude Moore
Danny & Frankie Withers
Marcus Nash
Fellowship BC,
Starkville
Mrs. Herman Nichols
Mr. & Mrs. Harry K. Woods
Mrs. Irene O'Brien
Max & Dunreath Holleyman
James C. Pogue
Green Bros. Gravel Co.
Mr. & Mrs. Heyward C. Green
Jo Ann Newman
Freddie Newman Family
Randy Newman Family
Ray Poole Jr., State Farm
Hi Grade Farm Supply

George & Claudette Faulk
Hammett Gravel Co., Inc.
Dunlap & Kyle Co., Inc.
MetteSave Discount Drugs
Betty W. Johnson
Don Snyder
Ms. Sylvia Crutchfield
Beverly Poole
John Dell Huckabee
Bettie Gail Meek
Nancy Shows
Mrs. Bobbylee Presley
Mrs. Renee Presley
Mary Jo Reames
Brian Dean & Family
John & Frances Read
Allen & Laura Clark
Lottie Robertson
James & Peggy Palmer
Melvin Robertson
James & Peggy Palmer
Oscar Rushing
Jerry & Janie Sisco
Mrs. Joyce Thompson Shelton
Spring Hill BC
Joe Shepard
June D. Shepard
Mrs. Quinny Sinclair
Mr. & Mrs. Lester Haddox
Milton Sisk
Shelia Huffman
Violet Smith
John Dell Huckabee
Bettie Gail Meek
Nancy Shows
Esther Spears
Rose Arong
Nancy Spitzer
Carol & Bill Harris
Alice Faye Stepp

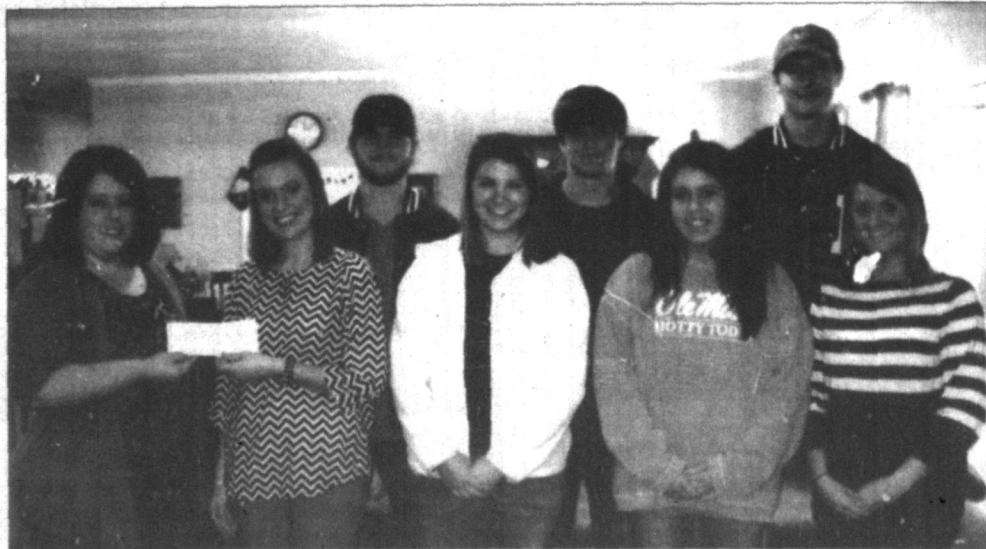
Edith M. Aldridge
Verda Stringer
Mr. & Mrs. Jerry L. Powell
Ross Talbert
Helen Jordan SSC, FBC Greenville
Robby Terry
Mr. & Mrs. Walter C. Fulton
Mrs. Margie Thomas
Mr. & Mrs. Rodis Wheeler
Peggy Thornhill Kokomo BC
Paul Tiadale
John Dell Huckabee
Bettie Gail Meek
Nancy Shows
William Wade
Mrs. Joyce C. Aycock
Kathryn Walker
Deer Creek BC
Mr. Regan Walters
Elton & Bonnie Pitts
Lois Waterman
Warren & Becky Strickland
Laura Watts
Mr. & Mrs. Lester Haddox
Harold & Lisa Riley
Faye White
David Macon
Bill & Glenda Funderburg
Henry & Nita West
Stanley & Donna Criss
LaDerle & Bonnie Doler
Ida Cheeseman
Tony Hardin
Jimmie Jones
Irma Boland
Joyce Whitfield
Ida Mae Bridges
Mr. William Winstead
Kenneth & Pat Posey
Nancy Martin Wood
Rudy & Tommye Loue Grenn
Bennie Wright
Terry & Julia Blalock
Tommy York
Jimmy & Joan Flemming
Mildred Virginia Young
Mr. & Mrs. Temple Dale
Martha Smith



Nolan Aikens, Trustmark Bank Vice-President, presents a check to Dr. Rory Lee, BCV Executive Director, for \$1,837.42 on behalf of the generous Trustmark employees.



Mr. Byron Beard delivered grapefruit, tangelos and tangerines to the Reedy Acres campus this morning on behalf of the Water Valley High School Future Farmers of America. Pictured are Jerry Helms and Teresa and Brandon Harris BCV houseparents.



Students from the Puckett Attendance Center BETA Club and Student Council collected \$375 for the India Nunnery Campus in Star, MS and presented the check to Mrs. Kimberly Reed, Campus Director. We so appreciate these young leaders for the support of The Baptist Children's Village.

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS FOR DECEMBER 23, 2012

Seeking the Savior • Matthew 2:1-15

As we approach the celebration of the miracle birth of our Savior, it would seem that moving to a passage in the book of Matthew is a far cry from the book of Hosea. I remind you that when you take into account the redemptive purpose of God, all scripture is linked together by that common thread. No matter where you read in scripture, you will find God's plan being carried out by Him. Our passage today is no different. Here we find three Wise Men, living in a far away land, showing up at the birth of Christ.

What Are You Looking For? (Matt. 2:1-2)

As we read our passage today we have to ask the questions, "Why and how did these Wise Men come in search of the newborn King of the Jews?" It is likely that these men were from a pagan background but through their studies they had come across some of the messianic prophecies that told of the birth of a King. They could have been astronomers who searched the skies for signs, but whatever the reason, here they are, looking for the King of the Jews and they have a desire to worship Him. Arriving in Jerusalem makes perfect sense because if a king were born you would assume he would be born in the palace in the capital city. The question they asked,

"Where is He who has been born King of the Jews," (v2 HCSB) turned Jerusalem upside down. Herod frantically called his advisors together and began looking for answers. We are all seeking answers to life's questions. Men and women alike are searching for fulfillment for their lives. These Wise Men are seeking their answers in the right place.

What Is Your Motive? (Matt. 2:3-8)

The latter part of verse two tells us that the Wise Men were seeking the newborn King to worship

Him. Herod's motive was altogether different. He saw this new King as a threat to him and his own position in life. As we read further we discover that Herod asks the wise men to report to him the exact location of this King so that he too may go worship Him. Herod's motive was not to worship; his motive was deception and dishonesty. Motives are very important in all our relationships and especially in our relationship to our Heav-



enly Father. We must understand that because we have a relationship with Jesus, we must come to Him as the Wise Men did: humbly, honestly, and worshipfully.

How Will You Respond? (Matt. 2:9-12)

The story of the Wise Men is based, as most of life is, on responding to questions and situations that arise in life. The Wise Men responded to see-

ing the star by coming to find the Christ child. They brought to Him gifts and fell on their knees and

worshipped Him. Herod responded by seeking ways to destroy the newborn King of the Jews. How do we respond to our Savior and His redemptive purpose in the world? Do we fall on our knees and worship Him? Do we bring gifts like our Lottie Moon Christmas Offering and our regular attendance in worship and Bible Study? Do we open our arms to the needy around us? Did we take time to fill a shoe box, adopt an angel tree child, or help a family in

need? How do we respond to the unprecedented love shown to us through the birth of this little baby in Bethlehem? There is only one response, and that response is worship, adoration, praise, service, and obedience to our Savior!

Who Is This Christmas Child? (Matt. 2:13-15)

As I stated earlier I believe all scripture is woven together by God's redemptive purpose through His Son, Jesus Christ. The Christmas child the Wise Men have come to see and worship is the fulfillment of the prophecies of the Old Testament and He is the embodiment of the promise and hope revealed in the New Testament. The angel of God instructed Joseph to take his family to Egypt to escape Herod. This was one of many prophecies fulfilled through the birth of Christ. In Hosea 11:1 we see that God would call His Son from Egypt. The virgin birth is another example of fulfilled prophecy. Who is this Christmas child? He is the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. He is everything and we have every reason to celebrate His birth!

Dedmon is Associate Pastor for Education/Outreach at Brandon Church, Brandon.

Jesus Our Immanuel • Isaiah 9:6-7; Matthew 1:18-25

God is great. God is good. Let us thank Him for...EVERYTHING! Our studies for the past three Sundays have presented Yahweh as our God, our Father and our Righteousness. As God, He is our Creator and Sustainer. As Father, He is our Nurturer and Protector. As Righteousness, He is our Forgiveness and Salvation. Yahweh is all we need. I pray I will NEVER get over the fact that God loved me enough to plan all along to create me, to sustain me and to sacrifice Himself for my sins by the shed blood of His Only Begotten Son.

That crimson arrow of Messianic prophecy which flies skillfully and accurately through the sacred pages of the Old Testament finds the center of its target in a manger in Bethlehem of Judea. The events surrounding the birth of Jesus are recorded in the gospels of Matthew and Luke. There are just a few more "stopping days" until we celebrate Christmas 2012. Please make the time with your family to read Matthew one and two and Luke one and two during these holy-days.

God loves us SO much. Jesus is the living proof. His name is Immanuel (Emmanuel). However they choose to spell it, His name means God with us. The definition of this name can be broken down into three parts. "Im" at

the front door means "with" while "el" at the back door means "Elohim," our Creator in Genesis. The middle part of the name is "manu" which being interpreted is...man you better believe this: God came for you! Please trust my low-tech "transpolation" of one the most near and tender of names for our Savior. God came to us.

Seven hundred years before the birth of

Jesus, Isaiah 7:14 recorded for us the prophecy that a virgin will conceive and bear a son and she will call His name Immanuel. In Isaiah 9:1-7 we find another huge set of clues to the joyful story of the coming of Christ. I translate these verses this way: Things are tough all over. One day in the area of Galilee (tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali surround the Sea of Galilee where Nazareth is located), the Light of all life will appear on the scene. Gladness and joy will be available to all the burdened ones. A boy child will be born

"toward" the people. We will be gifted with a son. He will be the true ruler of all. His name shall be proclaimed in several amazing ways which will bless all those who believe. This miracle child will be too wonderful for words. He will be our counselor. The doctor for all our maladies is available. He will see you now without an appointment. One call, that's all! He is God, the Mighty One, our

savior. The name Jesus means salvation. This salvation was accomplished through the birth of Mary's baby. God said He would come. He came. God delivers. God delivered Himself through the womb of a woman who surrendered herself as bondservant, the hand maiden of the Lord, the mother of Jesus.

Small wonder that Isaiah would be chosen by God to provide us with these specific details. The name Isaiah means Yahweh is salvation. I was not surprised to learn that God has preserved a complete copy of all sixty-six chapters of the manuscript of Isaiah. I saw these scrolls in the Shrine of the Book in Jerusalem with my own eyes. When Jesus preached in His home town of Nazareth, he read from the scroll of Isaiah. When Jesus claimed to be the fulfillment of the very passage He read in Luke 4, his own home town folks wanted to throw Him off one of those steep Nazareth hills. The book of Isaiah is quoted 22 times in the New Testament. Are you listening?

Feel His breath. Hear His heartbeat. Rest in His arms. Jesus came for you!

Brown is the staff evangelist at First Church, Richland.

Bible Studies for Life with Becky Brown



Remembering Compassion • Hosea 11:1-11

The beginning of a new year is upon us and most people usually take a moment to reflect on the events of their lives over the past year. Many times we make resolutions to lose weight, exercise more, see family more, etc. Often we are left with questions yet to be answered. For many adults, there is a reservoir of guilt built up because of life's failures. Much of it has to do with giving or receiving forgiveness to and from people in our lives. Other times it is guilt over sinful behavior. Our passage today reminds us that our God is a compassionate God, and is waiting to pour out His forgiveness on us.

Compassion Though Unrecognized (Hosea 11:1-4)

As we look at verse 1 of chapter 11 we need to be reminded that it has a two fold meaning. It looks backward to the Israelite's exodus from Egypt and forward to Joseph moving his family to Egypt to escape Herod. The main focus of the verse lies in the phrase; "The more they called them, the more they departed from me." (HCSB) Hosea goes on in verse 2 and following to describe the many ways God had acted compassionately toward His children. It seemed the more He sought them, the more they ran from Him. Hosea was trying to get the people to take an

honest and open review of their lives. In the same manner when we do this we will be able to see the many ways in which God has acted compassionately toward us, even though we did not see it at that time.

Compassion Amid Judgment (Hosea 11:5-7)

Again, Hosea draws our attention to the fact that though the children of Israel would not return to the kind of domination they endured at the hands of Pharaoh in Egypt,

they would face defeat and serve the king of Assyria. They would be punished for their unfaithfulness, yet even in that punishment we see the compassion God has for His people. He is angry with them but He also loves them. God's disciplinary actions toward us are always a part of His redemptive purpose for us. He wants what is best for us, and sometimes it takes discipline to help us see what is best.



Explore the Bible with Huey Dedmon

Compassion Over Anger (Hosea 11:8-9)

As you read this passage of scripture, you cannot help but sense the deep emotion expressed by God through Hosea. By the use of the names Admah and Zeboim, he reminds us that indeed God punishes His faithless people, but not to the extent they deserve. God has a deep love for His people that is just as much a part of His divine nature as is

His nature to judge sinfulness. What they deserved as punishment was far worse than what they received.

God had promised to deal compassionately with His children and to not allow them to be completely destroyed. As sinners we need to be thankful that we do not get what we deserve. Instead we get His divine compassion.

Compassion With Purpose (Hosea 11:10-11)

In these verses we catch a vision of the results God is looking for in deal-

ing with His people compassionately. His vision for His people is to see them not only return to the physical land He has given them but for them to return to Him spiritually. Because of their experiences in exile, His people would return to Him "trembling from the west." (v10 HCSB) He would then "settle them in their homes." (v11 HCSB) I believe that much like today, when a person comes to know Christ as Savior; they tremble with excitement and awe. God's people should tremble with excitement that their God loves them and deals with their waywardness through His compassion for them. The phrase, "settle them in their homes," carries the idea of being secure. No matter what happens in our lives we feel most secure in our own homes. God is telling them and us that our home is in Him and that is where our real security lies. God's compassion toward us has a purpose and that purpose is the redemption of His people.

As the new year begins let us remember that we need to be thankful that we have a God who has an enduring compassion for us. "But God proves His own love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us!" (Romans 5:8 HCSB)

Dedmon is Associate Pastor for Education/Outreach at Brandon Church, Brandon.

Jesus Our Shepherd • John 10:7-18

With great comfort and joy, I am happy to report that our Newborn Manger Guest also came to walk with us and lead us as our Journey Guide and Companion on this daily abundant life eternal quest. The Old Testament platform of Yahweh our God, our Father and our Righteousness provides the perfect stage for the coming of Jesus our Emmanuel and Jesus our Shepherd in the New Testament. Are you getting the big picture?

In fulfillment of all prophecy, Jesus was born to live a sinless life, die a substitutionary death, then rise again to prove Himself as victorious over both sin and death. God came TO us and FOR us! The Great Shepherd was the perfect, spotless Lamb as He died in our place FOR us. Today, He reigns triumphantly as the Chief Shepherd OVER us. In John 10:7-18, Jesus gave us a very simple example. He described Himself as the Good Shepherd Who dwells WITH us. Look for yourself and notice that our whole scripture passage for this lesson is written in red.

I hope that you will recall that a major part of the meaning of the great name "Yahweh" included the phrase "I Am." Throughout John's gospel, Jesus rightfully claims that same name as His own. I Am the Bread of Life. I Am

the Light of the World. I Am the Resurrection and the Life. I Am the Way, the Truth and the Life. I Am the True Vine. We explore this week two other of the "I Am" sayings of Jesus: I Am the Door and I Am the Good Shepherd.

The life of a shepherd and his sheep would have been very familiar to contemporaries of Jesus. In fact, that lifestyle originated with Abel, the second-born

son of Adam and Eve. Genesis tells us that Abel was a keeper of flocks. His elder brother, Cain, murdered Abel. There is a very clear "Christ picture" in the life and death of Abel. The first person to experience death in scripture was a shepherd. Jesus was not murdered or martyred. Our Good Shepherd willingly laid down His life for His sheep.

Sheepfolds were usually stacked stone corrals with no gate. The shepherd would lie down in the opening to rest, protecting the sheep until morn-

ing with his own body. He would guard against enemies that might enter the sheepfold or sheep that might attempt to wander out on their own during the night. A classic book must be recommended here for further study: "A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23" by Philip Keller.

All you ever wanted to know about sheep and shepherds can be found here, written from a biblical perspective.

Jesus is the door. He is the way INTO the fold through salvation and the protection INSIDE the fold from all enemies.

Then, Jesus is the good shepherd of the sheep. He is not a hired man working for someone else. He owns the sheep. He is a tender shepherd who loves His sheep and cares for each of them. He knows them and they know Him. There share a relationship of strong protection and daily provision. They are so closely connected that they move out confidently with

a word or a sound or a call from the voice of their master. He goes before the sheep and they follow in a connection of trust. He knows them by name.

During His earthly ministry, Jesus declared His eternality by stating, "Before Abraham was, I Am" (John 5:8). In the Garden of Gethsemane at the time of His arrest, the soldiers and chief priests and Pharisees said they were looking for Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus answered: "I Am" (John 18:6). Before the Kangaroo Council of Jewish elders, Jesus was asked "Are you the Son of God, then?" Jesus replied, "I Am" (Luke 22:70). To the woman at the well who was looking for the Messiah, Jesus proclaimed, "I Am" the One you seek (John 4:26).

We have now come full circle from Our God, Our Father, Our Righteousness to Our Immanuel, Our Shepherd. I love to quote Vance Havner. "When God says, 'I Am!' we respond in faith, 'You Are!' while declaring to a lost world, 'HE IS! Follow Him!'

In Revelation one and twenty-two, Jesus assures John this way: "I Am the Alpha and the Omega, Who is, Who was, Who is to come, the Almighty...I Am coming quickly."

Brown is the staff evangelist at First Church, Richland.

Just for the Record



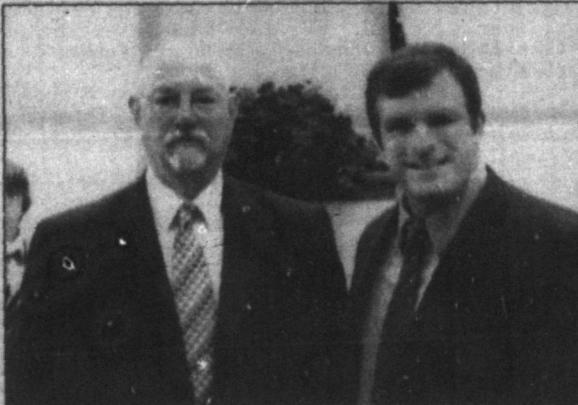
The Friends and Outreach Groups of **INGOMAR CHURCH, UNION COUNTY**, hosted students from New Haven Center for Special Needs Adults of New Albany for the annual Christmas program and meal in the Family Life Center of the church on December 4.



FIRST CHURCH, VANCLEVE, licensed Andrew B. Roberts to the gospel ministry Nov. 25. Shown are Mark Roberts, Tammy Roberts, and pastor Don Boone Sr.



PARKWAY CHURCH, HERNANDO, ordained Ted Darby as deacon Dec. 2. Shown are Darby and his wife Renee.



SLAYDEN CHURCH, MARSHALL ASSOCIATION, ordained Robert "Bobby" Barry as deacon. Shown are Barry, left, and pastor Rusty Fair.



CEDAR GROVE CHURCH, COLUMBIA, was recognized for 200 years of service. Shown are Courtney Selvy, former pastor and director of Historical Committee with pastor Todd Sumrall.



CARROLLTON CHURCH, CARROLLTON, recognized Ern Wells "Pete" Moore for 50 years service as deacon. Pictured, clockwise from top row, left, are Moore, Jim Pilgreen, Pastor Fletcher Moorman, and Moore's wife, Mary.



CALVARY CHURCH, BOGUE CHITTO, celebrated Family Christmas at Calvary. Each church family placed their special ornament on the Christmas tree. The event featured special music, an emphasis on the Lottie Moon Christmas offering, and a reading of the Christmas story. Hal Hatten, pastor.

END